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CRITICAL INCIDENTS IN MULTILINGUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING: CONTENT FOCUS

Any language learning process is a complex phenomenon as it occurs on the cognitive, affective and socio-cultural levels. The interrelatedness of them all and the contextually-determined way in which they interact make language learning experiences unique to individuals. The context in which more than two languages are learnt adds to its complexity. This article examines what multilingual language users perceive as meaningful in two different contexts of language learning: L2 *versus* L3. Although unique, these two processes exhibit a fair degree of homogeneity, for example in terms of one`s coping potential as the major appraisal value both in L2 and L3 learning and growing negativity about language learning in later stages of life in L3 learning.

1. Introduction: Complexity of a language learning process

Multilinguality means both quantitative (e.g. the number of languages known) and qualitative (e.g. different basis and resources for learning any consecutive language) changes and differences which emerge in the process of language learning (Cenoz 2001). On the cognitive level it results from different cognition and the conceptualizing breadth of a multilingual. It also relates to linguistic resourcefulness and the multiple linguistic reference systems that can be employed. Of no less influence will be educational experience itself, which has to be seen as extended exposure to learning resulting in some form of transfer of training and transfer of learning (Reinelt 2001). Most significantly this difference between bilinguals and multilinguals has to be seen as functioning at the affective level, in which motivational differences in the use of individual languages in a multilingual's possession, different dominance areas for individual languages, attitudes and social functions are most visible (Gabryś-Barker 2005). The issues of cognitive and affective content of significant learning experiences are addressed in this paper.

2. L2 versus L3 learning experiences: the earlier studies

In my previous studies, I discussed and compared the appraisal systems in L2 and L3 learning situations (Gabryś-Barker 2010a and 2010b) and also looked at affectivity and its role in these two learning contexts (Gabryś-Barker 2011). Although unique, these two processes exhibited a fair degree of homogeneity, for example in terms of one`s coping potential as the major appraisal value both in L2 and L3 learning and growing negativity about language learning during later stages of life in L3 learning. In more detail, I observed that the same features of learning processes and their affective dimensions are evaluated as significant for L2 and L3 learning, however differences in perception of them result in a shift from positive to negative attitudes and evaluations in an L3 learning context:

- the difference between the two contexts can be seen in the cases of L2 advanced ability, where the subjects exhibit intense fear of making no visible progress any more and reaching the state of *fossilization* or *plateau;*
- in L3 learning, negativity results from *perceived language complexity* on the one hand, and the *incompatibility of the method of instruction* with learners´ profiles and their learning histories on the other. (Gabryś-Barker 2010b: 44)

It was also observed that greater difficulties in L3 learning possibly resulted from the fact that whereas first FL learning (L2) experiences occurred in the subjects´ childhood, through private instruction or instruction at primary school, L3 learning often occurred in (early) adulthood. So it might be concluded that starting age plays a role in these perceptions of learning difficulties. Moreover, it seems that affective factors played a more significant role in language achievement in adulthood, and due to this L3 learning experience was often perceived as traumatic and therefore stressful and impeding progress. What also added to this trauma was the novelty of a situation which was not appreciated (contrary to the L2 context), since it brought insecurity, anxiety and fear of the unfamiliar and being assessed. It was also surprising to discover that adult L3 learners exhibited much more dependency on their teachers than in their L2 learning. It would therefore appear that in adult language instruction this issue needs to be addressed:

> the teacher dependency of adult learners should be reduced by introducing more *learner autonomy*, which should be promoted by teachers' greater openness to learners´ needs, more awareness of their learning profiles, and especially of their prior learning experiences, resulting in their positive and negative appraisals (Gabrys-Barker 2010b: 46)

It seems clear that adults´ affectivity also has to be addressed directly by developing adult learners´ motivation to learn, not only at the instrumental level

for career promotion or obligation as a part of programme of studies (studying L3 as a minor), but also by focusing more on integrative motivation and adult learners communication in L3. What is more, there is a pronounced need to demonstrate to adult learners´ ways of transferring their former (L2) learning experiences to a new context. This would lead to more success in L3 learning as resulting from learners´ positive perceptions of their *coping potential* in the new learning context.´

The study of the affective functioning of adult L3 learners demonstrated that the negativity expressed resulted from affective factors which seemed to play a more significant role in adult language achievement as adults demonstrate more vulnerability in terms of their self-confidence, self-esteem, sensitivity to how others see them, and how they see themselves. (Gabryś-Barker 2011).

The major findings of the above study singled out the following variables as conducive to failure in L3 learning:

- Motivation to learn (language choice. imposed *versus* chosen, intrinsic *versus* extrinsic)
- Status of L2 versus L3 as a (de-)motivating factor
- The language attainment level (L2- advanced, L3 – beginner/pre-intermediate) and coping potential
- Transfer of training (incompatibility of the method with learners experience of the prior leaning)
- Transfer of learning (an early age learning different from adult learning)
- Language awareness and language transfer (in L3 more awareness)
- The role of affectivity (e.g. self-concept).

Another empirical study (Gabryś-Barker and Otwinowska-Kasztelanic 2011), aiming at investigating the factors of early *versus* late starting age and elementary *versus* advanced level of proficiency in L3, gives evidence for these two variables as correlating with both success and positive perceptions of L3 learning.

3. On the nature of meaningful experiences: critical incidents

Research literature on meaningful educational experiences reports more often on teaching contexts and teacher perceptions of meaningful episodes in their classroom practices than on learners and their perceptions of those significant experiences. One such example is Bailey´s (1996) discussion of classroom-based research which focuses on findings concerning “surprising events” which teachers face in their daily practices (Table 1).

Table 1. Surprising events (based on Bailey 1996)

Long 1980	Carlos, a yawning student	Asking a display question to re-establish teacher control
Allwright 1980	Igor, a student asking questions and making comments that interfered with the lesson as it was planned	More attention focused on Igor, less turns for other students
Bailey 1980	A heated discussion on the unfairness of the test delivered	"Loss" of the half of lesson period.
Allwright and Bailey 1991	A late student because of a personal experience (robbery)	Departure from the planned topic and personalization of the lesson, resulting in language learning enhancement

More often than not, teachers seem to exhibit a lack of full awareness of their classroom behavior, demonstrated by their inability to comment on it, or their misperceptions (and misinterpretations) of it. When confronted with this observation, "the teachers were surprised and shocked when told what they had been doing in the classroom" (Good and Brophy 1973: 30). In discussing the reasons for this lack of teacher awareness, Good and Brophy point to the following contributive factors:

> (…) so much happens and happens so rapidly that the teacher is not aware of everything he does in the classroom (…) A second factor diminishing the teacher´s perception in the classroom is that teacher training programs have seldom equipped teachers with specific teaching techniques or provided them with specific skills for analyzing and labeling classroom behaviour (….) teachers are highly suspicious and often hostile towards the suggestions and evaluations provided by the curriculum supervisors (…) lack of specific feedback (about classroom behaviour) (p. 34).

It can be assumed that teachers´ lack of awareness of significant events in the classroom will most significantly affect learners´ perceptions of their learning experiences. Thus it seems necessary to look to the nature of those experiences.

Educational research elaborates on two distinct types of classroom episodes/ occurrence, critical events and critical incidents. The literature defines *critical events* as deliberately planned, implemented and controlled classroom episodes. On the other hand, there are also *critical incidents*, which occur unplanned on the spot and are identified by a teacher from amongst all the other classroom teaching/learning events:

> (…) critical incidents are produced by the way we look at a situation. A critical incident is an interpretation of the significance of the event. To take something as

> a critical incident is a value judgement we make, and the basis of that judgement is the significance we attach to the meaning of the incident. (Tripp 1993: 8).

> Because the lesson seems unproblematic, even uneventful, it does not mean that there is nothing to observe. (…) Hidden beneath the surface of this lesson are unresolved issues which, when they are made visible, reveal possible alternative beliefs, values and practice (Walker and Adelman 1975: 18)

Critical incidents contribute to the development of one´s understanding of the teaching/learning process and to the acquiring of a critical attitude towards beliefs held about what is and what is not effective in the teaching/learning process. So a critical incident (CI) is "any unplanned and unanticipated event that occurs during class, outside class or during a teacher´s career" (Farrell 2007: 44). It is an unpredictable event, emotionally loaded, offering challenges and conditioning reflection at different stages. Also, daily occurrences which turn into individual teacher´s routines, such as a habitual way of addressing students by their surnames (and not first names) or a routine way of asking questions (e.g. based on seating arrangement in the classroom), have to be considered critical incidents as they will directly influence the learners in certain not necessarily positive ways (e.g. discouragement or de-motivation). It is undoubtedly true that "although routines are essential to all professional practice, when they dominate they can often make us lose sight of what we are trying to achieve". (Tripp 1993: 41)

Tripp (*ibid.:* 24-25) goes back to the origins of the concept of a critical incident when he writes:

> The term "critical incident" comes from history where it refers to some event or situation which marked a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person or an institution (…) The vast majority of critical incidents, however, are not at all dramatic or obvious: they are mostly straightforward accounts of very commonplace events that occur in routine professional practice which are critical in the rather different sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures. These incidents appear to be "typical" rather than "critical" at first sight, but are rendered critical through analysis.

Following Tripp, James (2001) understands the analysis of CIs as being a process of asking questions about these events. This process of asking questions makes teachers/learners more aware and in this way challenges their assumptions about teaching/learning based on former beliefs and values; it modifies them or allows the teachers and learners to understand them better. Naming the events that occur "has long been known a powerful system for the determination of understanding" (Wright 2005: 86).

It can be assumed that a critical incident functions as a stimulus that triggers a learning process, the essence of which is registered in the challenge to be faced and the change resulting from it. These contribute to the creation of a critical

event in the teacher´s or learner´s mind. The identification of critical incidents operates on an individual level: different episodes are meaningful to different teachers/learners, as they derive from their underlying beliefs and assumptions about teaching/learning, also from the expectations they have. Years ago, Good and Brophy (1973: 70) acknowledged the importance of teacher expectations as self-fulfilling prophecies:

> (…) teachers´ expectations affect the way they treat their students, and, over time, the ways they treat the students affect the amount that the students learn. In this sense, then, expectations are self-fulfilling: teachers with high expectations attempt to teach more, and teachers with low expectations tend to teach less. As a result, both groups of teachers tend to end up with what they expected, although not with what they might have achieved with different expectations in the first place.

Self-fulfilling prophecies resulting from teachers´ expectations include not only academic achievements as mentioned by Good and Brophy (1973), but also all the various manifestations of behaviour: classroom procedures, type of rapport, interaction patterns and, in general, teacher presence in the classroom. Learners are aware of and sensitive to teachers´ expectations. As a consequence, they are reflected in the feedback that the teacher gets from his/her students:

1. The teacher expects specific behavior and achievement from particular students.
2. Because of these different expectations, the teacher behaves differently toward the different students.
3. This teacher treatment tells each student what behavior and achievement the teacher expects from him or her and affects his self-concepts, achievement motivation, and level of aspiration.
4. If this teacher treatment is consistent over time, and if the student does not actively resist or change it in some way, it will tend to shape his or her achievement and behavior. High-expectation students will be led to achieve at high levels, while the achievement of low-expectation students will decline.
5. With time, the student´s achievement and behavior will conform more and more closely to that originally expected of him or her. (*ibid.:* 73)

It seems from the above that a teacher will have a profound influence on his/her learners' learning success. Thus it is of the utmost importance for each individual teacher to be aware what expectations he/she exhibits towards the students and, through reflection upon his/her classroom behaviour, modify them if necessary (Gabryś-Barker 2012). These expectations will be reflected in meaningful episodes occurring in the class. Dörnyei (2001: 176) also points out initial teacher expectations as factors that "trigger off various events and teacher

behaviours, which, in turn, influence student performance in a corresponding fashion". They have both direct and indirect influence on classroom events and thus learner perceptions of their learning experiences and eventually their academic achievement.

Richards and Farrell (2005) strongly affirm that critical incidents can only be seen as significant when formally analyzed, because only formal analysis allows for a fuller understanding of the given incidents in terms of their origin. It also allows for an examination of the beliefs held by teachers about teaching and learners about learning. In other words, critical incidents do not exist as such but are created by an analytical practitioner (say, a teacher or a learner) and demonstrate teachers´ and learners´ awareness of their personal teaching/learning presence. Teacher and learner narratives, like the ones described in the study presented here, are a perfect tool for the analysis of events defined as critical incidents.

4. Description of the empirical study of multilinguals' learning episodes

4.1. Research questions

In this paper I intend to examine what multilingual language users perceive as meaningful in two different language-learning contexts: L2 *versus* L3. I would like to determine:

1 what the content of critical incidents (CIs) is in L2 and L3 learning;
2. whether there is a shift in learning concerns occurring with every subsequent language learnt.

Additionally, I would like to make a comparison with the results of the sample of multilingual learners used in my previous study (Gabryś-Barker 2010a).

4.2. Participants

The data comes from a group of sixty-four Polish multilingual language users, all students at the University of Silesia (Poland), whose language achievements and learning histories are fairly homogenous in terms of age, length of learning and the type of instruction received. They possess advanced L2 (English) competence (C1 level) and elementary and pre-intermediate L3 (mostly German) competence (A2/B1 level, as described in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)). The same people also constituted the study group in my project on affectivity in multilingual language learning (Gabryś-Barker 2011).

4.3. Data collection methodology

The data was collected from autobiographical texts produced by multilingual students in the form of narratives focusing on critical incidents (CIs) recalled by them in two learning contexts, those of L2 and L3. This understanding of the term "critical incidents" follows Tripp´s (1993) and Woods´s (1993) definition of the concept. As discussed earlier, these are the episodes that are recalled from memory as significant turning points for an individual, turning points which were either positive or negative and which changed individual motivations, attitudes and ways of coping with learning demands. They may be episodes seen as significant which for an external observer might even pass unnoticed (for example by a teacher), but are identified and recalled from autobiographical memory by a multilingual.

First, the subjects were asked to identify critical incidents (CIs) in their L2 and L3 learning histories, and then comment on and evaluate them as either positive (conducive to their learning progress) or negative (impeding their learning). The results of the present study sheds light on the way multilinguals perceive themselves as learners, which can contribute to improving the teaching of two foreign languages on the one hand and to making these subjects more aware of themselves as language learners on the other.

5. Data presentation

5.1. L2 learning experiences

Table 2 presents examples of critical incidents (CIs) identified by the subjects as either positive or negative in their original language.

Table 2. CIs in L2 learning

L2 context	Content focus of positive CIs	Content focus of negative Cis
In-classroom Episodes	Music and singing tasks Interactive speaking tasks Engaging first lesson of L2 Collaborative tasks (e.g. writing) Good classroom performance Positive assessment by teacher (praise, test results) Teacher verbal encouragement	Incompetent teachers (language incompetence, unfairness of judgement) Inappropriate language level of teacher talk Rotation of teachers (losing motivation to learn) Failed class performance

L2 context	Content focus of positive CIs	Content focus of negative Cis
Beyond-classroom episodes	Cartoons as first exposure to L2 First contacts with NSs in TL country (holidays, school trips, functioning in daily TL contexts) Showing off to family Skype interactions with native speakers Language competition Literature reading in spare time Temp job abroad (challenge) Autonomous learning (ESKK – a correspondence course) New tutor in one-to-one learning	Language shock in TL country

The content of **positive CIs** identified by the subjects included:

1. in the classroom: music, interaction with peers, speaking performance, teacher´s appreciation of effort;
2. beyond the classroom: integration with culture and native speakers (NSs), communication during holidays, self-reliance.

An example of a positive CI:
As my family consists of native American relatives, I was used to trying to communicate with them in English. From the very childhood I felt the inner need to talk to them, as they were very friendly and lovely people. (…) when I was in late teens I went to the United States. During a parade I asked a man wearing Washington´s costume if I could have a picture with him. He asked me if I was from London because to him I sounded like that. It was extremely rewarding for me. (Viola)

The critical incident quoted here illustrates well student´s attitude to L2 and the role of L2 – English in the subject´s learning history. It describes a situation beyond the classroom, where success in language use in an authentic situation boosted the learner´s self-esteem and integrative motivation.

The content of **negative CIs** recalled by the subjects included:

1. in the classroom: inappropriacy of teaching methods, teachers perceived as incompetent, lack of success;
2. beyond the classroom: inability to communicate in the target language country (lack of comprehension).

An example of a negative CI:
My critical incident in L2 was based on the event in the secondary school. I did not understand the usage of Past Perfect tense and I went to my teacher and asked for an explanation. Unfortunately, the teacher refused to help me and he

said he had no time. It was a very difficult situation for me because I could not do my homework and any exercises when the teacher started to compare past perfect and past simple tense.(...). I realized that I had to find information about those tenses and to try to understand them on my own. I went to the library and found an excellent book which presented the usage of these tenses and I understood it all completely. I regret the teacher did not explain it to me but it was very motivating for me to work on my own. (Monika).

Here, the teacher´s unsympathetic (according to the learner) attitude to her learning problems is a negative incident, or at least perceived as such by the subject. However, initial learning problems and the teacher´s reluctance to help led the learner to a more autonomous approach and a solution to learning difficulties by individual initiative. Although registering some resentment against the teacher, the girl still sees the outcome of this negative incident as positive and boosting her motivation to learn on her own. It might be that her initial positive appraisal of learning English made her put more effort into learning to succeed.

5.2. L3 learning experiences

Table 3 gives examples of both positive and negative critical incidents in the L3 learning stories of the multilinguals involved in this study.

Table 3. CIs in L3 learning

L3 context	Content focus of positive CIs	Content focus of negative Cis
In-classroom Episodes	Music in class Teacher´s individual approach to learners Teacher as a person (sharing experiences) Good performance in class Teacher´s enthusiasm Exam/test success Outstanding ability in some area of language (pronunciation) Decision to take *matura* exam in L3	Embarrassment at making errors (esp. in pronunciation) Dislike of the sound of L3 (German) Incompetent teacher (language, teaching) Overwhelming grammar presentation on articles in L3 (German) Language shock (a trip to L3 country) Neglect of a good learner A failed test Fossilized competence (wrong group placement)
Beyond-classroom episodes	Music as a boosting factor Personal contact with a Ns Internet chats	Temp job (inability to communicate) Not getting a language-related job Family-related context (historical perspective)

The content of **positive CIs** remembered by the subjects included:

1. in the classroom: an enthusiastic teacher with an individualized approach to learners, success achieved;
2. beyond the classroom: communicating with and personal (intimate) contacts with NSs, music.

An example of a positive CI:
One day I found a pretty interesting job advertisement on the internet. A company from Warsaw was looking for young and energetic people to work for them for about six months. The job involved meeting foreigners, organizing their time in Poland and being a tourist guide for them. The only requirement was knowledge of two foreign languages. I was really disappointed because I am fluent in English but my German was quite poor. Since that day I have decided to work hard in order to improve my German. Obviously this was a critical incident in L3 learning. Thanks to that experience I can notice some progress I have made since German became much more important for me. (Magda)

The subject evaluated this CI as a positive one. Although the initial failure to meet the job requirements due to her lack of competence in L3 meant failing to get the job, it nevertheless led the subject to do more intensive work on her L3-German. So the initial failure had a positive outcome. The incident demonstrates a beyond-the-classroom situation, where instrumental motivation is very strong and pushes the subject to more intensive language work in class.

The content of **negative CIs** evoked by the subjects included:

1. in the classroom: making errors, negative evaluation, a teacher personality and a lack of professionalism, dislike of the language;
2. beyond the classroom: difficulties in communication, negative historical associations.

An example of a negative CI:
Four years ago I started learning German at the Silesian University. I did not know this language at all. I attended the group which was at the elementary level. The first lesson of German was a traumatic experience for me. I remember that before starting the lesson, I had a positive attitude to German. Nevertheless, the perception of this subject changed immediately when I saw a teacher of German, she did not smile, she was standing in front of the class (...) her behaviour indicated that she was really a demanding person. She introduced herself and switched into German immediately. She spoke so quickly and with such a bizarre accent and intonation that I was frightened. During the whole lesson she did not say a word in Polish. (...) I could not understand a word. Suddenly the teacher asked me to introduce myself. I could not utter a single word. The pronunciation and words in German were too complex. The others started to laugh. The teacher said I had to improve my skills to catch up with the rest of the group. I was anxious (...) Nowadays, when I recall the situation, I think that the teacher

should not have treated me in this way. She should have helped me to construct a sentence. Moreover, she should have criticized the group who did not show respect to me. Consequently, this situation contributed to the fact that my attitude towards German is not really positive. (Kasia)

This is only the beginning of Kasia´s story. After some time, she decided to have one-to-one German tuition, which helped her German greatly. Analyzing the situation, Kasia believes that she is more successful now not thanks to the additional learning experience but because of her tutor, her agreeable personality and sympathetic attitude to Kasia´s problems with German. Clearly, in this case, affectivity and perception of the L3 teacher must have contributed to her negative attitude to L3. Also fear of being laughed at and ridiculed in front of her peers in class had a strong impact on her L3 negativity.

6. Discussion of L2 *versus* L3 critical incidents

Variables observed in the recalled critical incidents support the findings of the studies referred to in section 2, in respect of the teacher´s role and autonomy in each learning context, negative episodes and their role in increasing and/or suppressing motivation, and also perceptions of the status of L2 and L3.

The focus of the majority of critical incidents is on the role the teacher played in the classroom. As Schumann (1997: 321) puts it

> Frequently, one does not have to be pressured to engage in something new, but because of the attraction to another person, one may willingly try things that would previously have been appraised neutrally or negatively.

Of course if this attraction to the teacher is not there, or worse, if the teacher by his or her approach to teaching and/or attitude to learners presents him/herself as a discouraging figure- as was observed in the CIs in the L3 context- there may be no willingness to engage in the learning task. Thus, pressure alone or the obligation to learn will not be a very good predictor of success. In the case of L2 learning their teachers and their approach to teaching, and to learners in the great majority of cases, is seen as positive. What the results of the study demonstrate is how important appropriate teaching methods, enthusiasm and personal attitudes to learners expressed by readiness to help or adjust teaching to individual learner needs really are. The methods used generally correspond to the learners´ expectations of being able to develop their communicative skills, which allows them to see their relevance to language use beyond the classroom for communication and integration with L2 culture. The subjects clearly reject all but communicative methods and see them as inappropriate. A number of the CIs relate directly to this. Some of the CIs that occurred beyond the classroom described failure to communicate as resulting from the wrong type of formal

instruction. Teachers´ efforts in giving positive feedback in the form of praise and encouragement are seen by the subjects as most conducive to their language development and as increasing their motivation to learn. They constitute the core of many CIs in L2 learning.

On the other hand, the majority of L3 critical incidents strongly criticize not only conventional instruction and routine, but also the teacher who is seen as rigid and rule-obeying. Most positive CIs describe exactly the opposite: enthusiastic and approachable teachers with an individualized approach to learners. However, these are mostly the tutors in one-to-one instruction described by the subjects. The novelty of the situation expressed for example by unfamiliarity with the teaching method used in language instruction may result in either positive or negative responses. Schumann (1997: 296) in his analysis of language learning biographies comments on the reflection of one of his subjects in the following way:

> (…) a good student-teacher relationship maybe required before novel (different –*addition mine*) teaching practices will be appraised positively. (…) it appeared that she valued novelty when it facilitated achieving her goals, when it was compatible with her coping abilities, and when it was enhancing of her self and social image.

Another factor which appears in both learning contexts is the subjects´ autonomy. Surprisingly, it is much greater in L2 learning and derives not only from being successful but also from failing in language performance. Effort is put in to becoming better not only in the classroom, but beyond as the integrative aspect of learning English is strongly expressed in the subjects' choice of CIs. In the case of L3, autonomy is impeded by the already mentioned reliance on the teacher, so when a failure occurs and the teacher is not there to help, the subjects give up their ambitions to improve. Negative CIs often lead to loss of motivation. Their emphatically expressed lack of coping potential in learning a L3 also derives from the fact that L3 is seen as more complex than their L2. Such a perception impedes the desire to work on one´s own. The only exception found in the subjects´ comments relates to the need for communicating with native speakers of L3.

The choice and sequence in which languages are learnt also have a strong impact on learning experiences. In this study English is learnt as L2 and German and French as L3. This means English, the language of greater prestige and utility, enjoys a privileged status; motivation to learn it will therefore always be greater and attitude to it more positive. L3 here can only be raised in importance by professional interests and direct contacts with native speakers.

As was observed in this and the other related studies, the subjects felt secure in L2 due to a variety of factors, one of which was method of instruction. The widely used communicative approach in teaching English (or some derivative form of it) makes these learners more secure with this type of language instruction, where less focus is on correcting and being correct, and where generally teaching is

more flexible, aiming at the development of effective communication in a foreign language. This focus on communication requires great effort from teachers to develop a facilitative rapport with their learners and to pay more attention to creating an appropriate, conducive-to-learning atmosphere in the classroom. In L3 instruction on the other hand, be it in French or in German, approaches to teaching are more rigid. Often the grammar translation method constitutes a core approach to language instruction, which these adult learners find hard to come to terms with, or even see as de-motivating and far from satisfying what they perceive as their real language needs beyond the classroom context.

7. Concluding remarks

A pretty uniform picture of a multilingual language user/learner emerges from the studies carried out with L3 adult learners at the elementary and pre-intermediate levels. L2 learning is seen as a life experience, whereas L3 is perceived as a learning experience. The fact that L3 is seen as only a learning experience shows the significance of the type of formal instruction and classroom context the learners are exposed to.

The learning experiences as evoked in the subjects´ narratives evolved significantly from early life L2 learning to more recent instruction in L3. This evolution, however, did not lead the subjects to more positivity and as a consequence no significant L3 language success was anticipated and expressed by the subjects. The findings of the study, demonstrating the role of learners´ individual perceptions of their learning experiences and critical incidents in two contexts (L2 and L3), can contribute to the development of multilingual language instruction in similar contexts, where L2 is at the advanced level and L3 at a much lower one, and introduced as an additional language. In the Polish educational context described in this study, where L3 is acquired as an additional obligatory foreign language, it is quite common that this language instruction is often regarded by students as a waste of time and an unnecessary burden.

As I also observed in my previous study (Gabryś-Barker 2010a), this pretty light-hearted attitude to L3 learning seems to be an important issue which relates to the need to develop adult learners´ motivation to learn, not only at the instrumental level, but most importantly by demonstrating the ways of transferring their prior (L2) learning experiences to a new context, to make them feel more secure and sure of their L3 learning success. This will enhance learners´ positive perceptions of their coping potential in the new learning context which is, as was thoroughly discussed earlier (Gabryś-Barker 2010a), understood to be the major factor in language learning success. The development of coping potential and one´s positive perception of it lead to active involvement in a learning activity, whereas a negative perception of one´s coping potential results in disengagement from a learning task and dependency on the teacher *(ibid*.). This teacher dependency of adult learners should be reduced by introducing more learner

autonomy. It can be promoted by teachers' awareness of and greater openness to learners´ needs, more awareness of their learning profiles, and especially of their prior learning experiences, resulting in their positive and negative appraisals. To make adult learners themselves more conscious of their own learning profiles, explicit learner training should be introduced. It should be based on the learners´ former L2 experiences, thus promoting transfer of learning.

Appendix: "L2 versus L3 learning experiences: focus on critical incidents" (two reflective essays in their unedited original form)

Essay 1.

Before the school year started and I was going to become the fifth grade student, I was anticipating the big event that was meant to happen in September. A foreign language was being introduced into our curriculum and everybody expected it to be French, however, it occurred that the principal decided otherwise. As a consequence of that, I needed to bid farewell to the much awaited French and accept the fact that I had to study the language I felt no desire to study. Therefore, I was quite reserved towards my future career as an English language user, definitely underestimating my possibilities.

During my first test I did terribly. And there was nothing to be proud of. Nevertheless, I was way too ambitious to simply accept the fact that I got a bad mark without trying to do my best first. That was probably one of the critical incidents that occurred throughout my ESL education. It was also followed directly by the second critical incident, which was obtaining A+ in the second test. This definitely raised my self-esteem and helped me develop confidence.

As for the fifth foreign language, I had a lot of very interesting experiences, several of which could be thought of as critical. Nonetheless, only one of them was remarkable for me. I started learning Russian at the university. It was not my major, therefore, I did not feel especially attached to it, which might have resulted in my approach to the language – a rather indifferent, slightly negative observation of how to avoid unnecessary effort. Moreover, I felt that the teacher did not like me. She kept on picking me because of my surname (a common Polish surname, easily remembered- addition mine). *This is how it has always been when there were no volunteers during a lesson. So I had a defensive approach to the language itself. One day the teacher asked me to read my homework and so I did. Her reaction was totally unexpected! She praised me and said that she had been observing me since the very beginning of our course, and according to her, I had a lot of talent and a huge potential. This left me speechless, especially because of the fact that the teacher rarely complimented anyone.*

These two critical incidents have a lot in common. The first aspect is their affective character. Both are related to the emotional sphere of the self and both

oscillate between the categories of positive and negative associations. What is more, both of the incidents raise the problem of self-esteem. Defining myself as an average or a rather poor student, I did not have high expectations of myself. However, having discovered some natural ability to succeed in learning or being given support form authority, my approach and attitude towards the language changed drastically! As an ambitious person, I rarely give up. Nevertheless, in the moments of feeling of resignation, I am likely to decrease my judgement of "can-do" tasks and I need a feedback, the positive one, I mean. The factor of self-esteem is thus an extremely essential matter in my personal language learning experience.

Summing up, the analysis of the observed phenomena may lead to the conclusion that the affective factors play a more significant role in my language learning experiences. The individual differences such as self-esteem or ambition are of great importance not only as applied to a FLL but also to any other sphere of life. Lacking confidence in my potential and language proficiency, I felt discouraged, therefore I believe, the critical incidents I have described here helped me realise that it is confidence that provides me with the motivation to proceed. (Edyta).

Essay 2.

Critical incidents are these moments which have certain significance for a person. They can be either positive or negative. However, I tend to remember better the positive ones as far as my L2 is concerned, and the negative ones which are connected with my L3 which is German.

First, I learnt L2 long before L3 and I have many positive memories from that period from my English lessons in a primary school. At the initial stage of my education I experienced a critical incident concerning nursery rhymes learning. At first, my teacher said a rhyme very slowly for us to notice all words which we were taught previously, and then after some additional listening, we were supposed to repeat the rhyme after the teacher.

In my opinion, practising nursery rhymes was not only a good way to teach and revise vocabulary, but it also made our classes more entertaining and interesting for us. I recollect that my peers were not ashamed of making mistakes and we created a strong bond between us. So introducing nursery rhymes is a good idea even with such young learners.

On the other hand, I do not consider learning German as a generally positive experience. At the very beginning of my German classes, my teacher tried to teach us German alphabet. We were supposed to write the phonetic realisations of letters simultaneously to practising them aloud. After only one listening the teacher picked me out and asked to tell the whole alphabet.

"Surprisingly enough", I made a mistake and I pronounce a letter in a funny way, which made my teacher and peers laugh at me. I obviously felt ashamed and these incidents de-motivated me in learning German. Probably, this is also

the main reason why I dislike German, although it may seem ridiculous. As far as my opinion is concerned, the teacher should have practised the alphabet many times before asking the students to tell it in order to embarrass them.

The critical incidents in my live happened very often. However not all of them bear such a significance as the ones I have chosen to comment on here. (Dominika)

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COGNITIVE, AFFECTIVE AND LINGUISTIC CONSEQUENCES OF ETHNOCENTRISM IN APPREHENSIVES' COMMUNICATION

Communication apprehension, identified with feelings of tension or embarrassment experienced in social interaction, induces an array of communication avoidance behaviors. Meanwhile ethnocentrism, with its negative view on other cultures, implies a tendency to avoid communication with persons of different cultures, as well. The cumulative effect of both phenomena may induce the catastrophic effects of communication withdrawal, connected with deprecating views on other cultures or their representatives. The uniqueness of the speech event and uncertainty caused by the cultural differences, augmented by the lack of skills and knowledge about the interlocutor, provokes anxiety.

The findings of this empirical study on the relationship between ethnocentrism and communication apprehension taking place in the foreign language classroom demonstrate that students with high levels of communication apprehension display higher levels of ethnocentrism in comparison to their non-apprehensive peers, mainly due to their cognitive, affective, and linguistic barriers.

Living in the constantly changing modern world, often called 'a global village', is inextricably connected with a growing demand to communicate with speakers of other national backgrounds. The need to use different languages in the era of globalization and international migration has prompted linguists and pedagogues to take an interest in effective foreign language instruction. However, even expert teaching may fail in the case of students who have a problem with communication in general, as in the case of communication apprehensives, who experience a type of anxiety that affects interpersonal communication carried out in the mother tongue (Horwitz 2002). Also, their problems may increase due to ethnocentrism, understood as the experience of seeing one's own culture as superior to others. For this reason the ways in which one approaches the task of communication by means of a foreign language may be largely influenced by their attitude to communication, as well as by their understanding of the role of

their own culture in intercultural communication. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to shed light on the relationship between ethnocentrism and communication apprehension in the foreign language (FL) classroom, as revealed by Polish adolescents learning English. For this purpose, first the issues in question are explained from the perspective of foreign language acquisition (FLA). Then the results of an empirical research carried out in the context of Polish secondary grammar school devoted to the issue are analyzed and discussed.

1. Communication apprehension

In early studies communication apprehension was characterized as "a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication" (McCroskey 1970 in McCroskey and Beatty 1984: 79). According to another definition, it was termed as "the fear or anxiety an individual feels about orally communicating" (Daly 1991: 3). Nevertheless, later the term was expanded and redefined as "a broad-based fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey 1976: 3). Nowadays it may also be viewed as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey 1982: 137). This shift in approach to the construct of communication apprehension, originally restricted to talking, indicates that it now encompasses all modes of communication. As well, communication apprehension has been recorded in small groups and dyads, although it is mostly linked to the anxiety felt by individuals before public appearances or speeches.

Communication apprehension is viewed as an apprehension trait, which means that it designates a person's stable disposition to feel consistently anxious in a number of communicative situations across a variety of circumstances, such as time, situations, and contexts (Richmond and Roach 1992). The phenomenon is directly connected with communication avoidance (McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond 1985), because individuals who generally fear communication also tend to evade it. Therefore the term of communication apprehension is intertwined with other communication avoidance constructs, such as stage fright or performance anxiety.

This type of anxiety, identified with feelings of tension or embarrassment experienced in social interaction, particularly with strangers (Manning and Ray 1993), plays a very important part in the understanding of the cognitive processes giving rise to specific communicative behaviors. Aside from the obvious characteristics of an apprehensive individual (withdrawal, a fearful and anxious reaction to communicative situations), there are specific cognitive process taking place, such as "(1) perceptions of low personal competency, (2) an inability to identify appropriate social behaviors, and (3) anticipation of negative outcomes to interaction" (Greene and Sparks 1982: 1-2). Due to one's inability to identify communication behaviors leading to the realization of the desired interaction